



Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

Vol. 1, No. 18, August 2, 2019

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From the Editor

Last weeks featured author, Ana Brazil, offered a free copy of her book, *Fanny Newcomb and the Irish Channel Ripper*, to a reader that either commented or shared the post from the Pages of the Past Facebook group. The lucky reader was....(insert drum roll here)...Teresa Griffin. Congratulations Teresa and thank you, Ana!

Some changes are underway for Pages of the Past. I'm working on *Pages of the Past* having its own website, rather than having a [page on my Trisha Faye site](#). The plan is to have it up and going by October. Right now all the past issues are archived on the subpage. But, I'm finding that first of all, unless you know it's there, it's hard to find. Secondly, everyone is busy. It's hard to keep up with all the current items hitting our inboxes, so most don't have the time to run around and look at back issues anyway.

I thought if Pages of the Past had its own website, then I could break out all the author interviews and articles about writing historical fiction and have each available independently.

Also, where each newsletter features one to two books of a different era, I plan to combine all the books that have been featured and put them together. So one would be 'Books from the 1930s' and have a list of all the featured books from that time period. I think that would be more accessible and easier to share on Facebook, hopefully giving more exposure to some of the great books out there.

These changes have been in the early planning stages over the past two weeks. And then, earlier this week I was messaging with one of the authors that will be in a future issue, Verne Albright. He sent me links to two author interviews he had on other sites. Since the web site changes won't be final for a few months, he spurred a great idea about the author interviews. I'm setting up a blog post for Pages of the Past so I can take each of the earlier Author Spotlights and put it out as an independent blog post. Again, I think having that it will be easier to share and tweet and whatnot, giving more exposure to the wonderful authors that have given of their time to share their historical fiction writing adventure with us.

Thanks for joining us this week!

Trisha

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Research Round-Up

Researching for historical fiction is such a huge subject that it's impossible to cover in only one post, as evidenced by the countless hours many of us have spent down the rabbit holes chasing elusive details and facts.

Here are five sites that talk about researching historical fiction. Okay – four sites about historical fiction and one site that discusses researching vintage and antique signature quilts. There's a wealth of information in these five sites – along with more great links to follow and read.

See you down the rabbit hole!

[8 Rules of Writing Historical Fiction Research](#)

3. Study old pictures.

Evocative historical writing is made up of more than facts and figures. By examining old pictures—either paintings or photographs—you can glean impressions that inspire your imagination and details that populate your descriptions. Many digital archives are now coming online, making this aspect of historical research easier than ever before. I relied on the New York Public Library's Old New York collection, where you can see a photograph of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum. I also used the Beck Archives Photograph Collection at the University of Denver, where I saw a photograph that informed my description of heliotherapy (a real treatment for tuberculosis) and inspired my fictional Hospital for Consumptive Hebrews. The photograph below of a dormitory at the Hebrew Orphan Asylum was crucial for the setting of several important scenes in the novel.

[Researching Signature Quilts](#)

My first two purchased antique Signature quilts took place in 2000. The Navy-related one was found at a large antique show in Chantilly, VA in January. The New York Album-style quilt was found at the Howard County Maryland Fairgrounds Antique Show late March 2000. I was so excited I quickly transcribed the 42 signatures and started googling. Genealogy-focused websites are also a great place to start.

My first guess for dating this quilt (based on the fabrics in the quilt) was that it may have been made somewhere between 1860 and 1875. One of two things could help me prove this: genealogical research or finding a quilt with a stitched or written date on it that included some of the same fabrics.

[Historical fiction: 7 elements of research](#)

One way to examine fiction, either as writer or reader, is to consider seven critical elements: character, dialogue, setting, theme, plot, conflict, and world building. Every story succeeds or disappoints on the basis of these elements; however, historical fiction has the added challenge of bringing the past to life within each element.

Research is key. What are readers looking for? Where do you start? Below is an explanation of the seven elements of research in the context of historical fiction followed by a series of tips on researching material for your historical novel.

[A Research Primer for Historical Fiction Writers](#)

As all fiction writers understand, the success of any story or novel depends not only on the writer's ease with technique, with the elements of plot and character and dialogue, but also on the sense of authority one conveys. And mastering the content is just as essential as mastering the craft. So just as writers of contemporary (or more autobiographically inflected) novels and stories need to "know" their characters, settings, and subjects, historical fictionists must "know" whereof they write.

[The Copperfield Review](#)

2. Be as specific as you can when researching.

When you've chosen your time period, or when your time period has chosen you (as it occasionally happens), then it's time to narrow your topic to a workable size. This is particularly true if you're dealing with a vast subject, like the American Civil War, for example. To research the entire war would be too huge of a project, that is unless you're Shelby Foote and willing to dedicate 20 years of your life to the task. There is simply too much material to shift through. If you can narrow your focus to something like a single event, a single year, or a single battle then the research will be far more workable and not as burdensome.



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Fancy wheels and exotic vacations aren't the items that threaten to kill my budget. My downfall is books, magazines – and antique stores. So when I saw Caroline Kaiser's book featuring an antiques appraiser, it caught my attention right away. And with a 1928 diary thrown into the mix too? It only made it even better. Welcome our guest author today, Caroline Kaiser.



Hello, Caroline. Before you were an author and freelance editor, you worked as an antiques cataloger and appraiser. How did your experiences in that career lead you to write your historical fiction novel, *Virginia's Ghost*?

I had a job in an auction house cataloging and appraising glass, silver, and porcelain for nearly fourteen years. It was a fascinating place to work, and certain parts of the building, which was an old warehouse, were rather spooky. In particular, the basement (or "lower gallery,"

as we called it) was dark and gloomy, and one of my co-workers believed it was haunted—she said she heard voices when she was working down there alone. And I remember working in the basement one Saturday morning, with only my dog for company, and he began barking relentlessly at . . . something. I don't know what it was he detected, but the experience gave me chills.

From all this, I began to think of the auction house as the perfect setting for a ghostly murder mystery, and being surrounded by so many old and beautiful objects made me want to set a good portion of the story in the past. The past was very much alive for me while I was working there, and I was always wondering about who might have owned the objects I handled, what their lives must have been like.

In your book, the ghostly apparition offers Virginia her diary, written in 1928. What was it about that time period that drew you to set your tale in that era?

The 1920s is my favorite era, and if I could time-travel back to it for a good long visit, I would. There was a beauty to that period in terms of fashion and decorative arts that to my mind has never been equaled. And it was a giddy time (particularly if you were rich), with glamorous parties, exciting music, and frenetic

dancing. The era was characterized by a wild, indulgent quality, personified in my caddish jazz pianist character, Freddy Alderdice. But there was a sweetness and innocence to the time too, which I think I captured with Constance Pendleton, the emotionally fragile young woman who falls head over heels in love with Freddy.

I chose the year 1928 specifically because by that time Prohibition was over within Ontario (my setting is Toronto), and I wanted my respectable, upper-crust characters to be able to drink legally. As well, it was a time when talking pictures were just starting to appear—*The Jazz Singer* had been released in late 1927. This development was starting to affect Freddy's ability to make a living—he'd been providing musical accompaniment to silent movies, but he was starting to realize that this wouldn't last much longer.

Do you have any favorite methods you use in researching your books?

I did some internet research on several topics: Prohibition in Ontario; the King Edward, a posh Edwardian Toronto hotel where fictional Freddy played with the real-life orchestra conducted by Luigi Romanelli; and of course Romanelli himself, Toronto's "King of Jazz." Through internet research, I also learned a lot about the effects of a particular type of poison used in the murder that my auction house appraiser character, Virginia Blythe, is involved in solving.

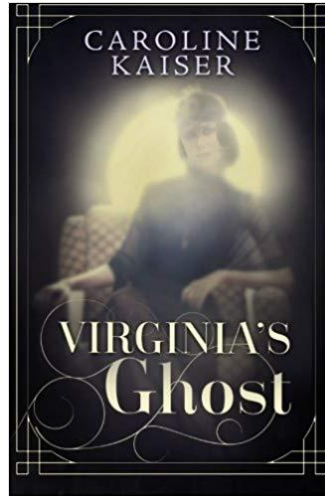
Because I set the 1920s storyline in Rosedale, the Toronto neighborhood where I live, I could easily visit and soak up the ambience of some of the locations I used in the book—the stately Victorian house on Elm Avenue where Constance had lived, and Craigleigh Gardens, the lovely park where pivotal scenes between Constance and Freddy take place. There are a lot of details in the book about antiques, which was my world for so long, and most of the information about those came from my own knowledge and experience.

What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?

Beyond the research, I guess the biggest challenge was getting the language just right in Constance's narration, through her diary, of her 1920s world. Toronto was quite British at that time, so I wanted the characters to sound a little British, but I didn't want to go over the top with the slang either because I didn't want them sounding like clichés. Often I would read parts of the book aloud to myself, particularly the dialogue, to get the slightly formal quality just right. I also had to make sure that the characters didn't use expressions that no one could have possibly used at that time because I know that this always jars the reader's right out of a story. My training in editing historical fiction, among other genres, came in very handy.

Do you have a current historical fiction work in progress? Can you give us a little teaser about it and let us know when we can look for it?

I've been writing a sequel to *Virginia's Ghost* and have recently completed my third draft. I still have a ways to go with it and expect to release it in 2020. Tentatively, I've titled it *The Spirits of South Drive*, and it's also a murder mystery. This time, Virginia, my appraiser protagonist, encounters a body in a closet, as well as four ghosts, all art students from the 1920s, while she's appraising the contents of a Gothic Revival mansion. As I did with *Virginia's Ghost*, I weave together the present-day murder mystery with the story the ghosts have to tell—the latter plunges readers into Toronto of the Jazz Age. While this storyline is again mostly set in Rosedale, the characters also venture down to Chinatown within the Ward, which was Toronto's vast immigrant slum. The ghosts have a shocking secret to reveal, and they're also integral to Virginia figuring out the identity of the murderer.



You can find *Virginia's Ghost* here:

Amazon.ca https://www.amazon.com/Virginias-Ghost-Caroline-Kaiser-ebook/dp/B00NTC5CYU/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=virginia%27s+ghost+caroline+kaiser&qid=1563892231&sr=8-1

Barnes & Noble <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/virginias-ghost-caroline-s-kaiser/1120388529?ean=9780993813702>

Indigo <https://www.chapters.indigo.ca/en-ca/books/virginias-ghost/9780993813726-item.html?ikwid=virginia%27s+ghost&ikwsec=Home&ikwidx=0>

You can find Caroline Kaiser here:

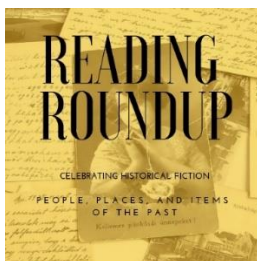
My website <https://www.carolinekaisereditor.com/virginias-ghost/>

Facebook author page <https://www.facebook.com/carolinekaiserauthor>

BIO: Caroline Kaiser worked for nearly fourteen years as an antiques cataloguer and appraiser at a busy auction house, where she headed the glass, ceramics, silver, and toy departments. She has enjoyed a lifelong love affair with both old things and old Hollywood movies. She now earns her living as a freelance fiction editor. A native of Toronto, she hasn't yet decided to live somewhere else. *Virginia's Ghost* is her first novel.

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The 1920s

The Secret

Jennifer Wells



London 1920 – Troubled young dancer, Lily, is invited to remote Elmridge House, home of the wealthy theatre benefactor Dr Cuthbertson to escape her troubled past. An isolated guest room and a surprise pregnancy leave her longing to return to the stage and her London life. She soon discovers that Elmridge House is not all that it seems – the house holds secrets which make it difficult for her to leave.

Missensham 1942 – Young nurse Ivy Watts is called out to a patient at Elmridge House, home of the aloof Mrs Cuthbertson and reclusive Dr Cuthbertson. Ivy is entranced by the opulence of the house and its glamorous past, but when she tells her mother about Mrs Cuthbertson, her mother becomes fearful and forbids her from returning to the house. What secrets does Elmridge House hold? And why does Ivy's mother live in fear of the mysterious Mrs Cuthbertson?

Perfect for the fans of Lesley Pearce and Susan Lewis.

Authors: Do you have a historical fiction book or short story that you'd like featured in Pages of the Past? Email me at texastrishafaye@yahoo.com to see about scheduling your book or short story in a future issue.

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